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Modigliani paintings once thought to be worth tens of millions now denounced as fakes



One of the paintings on display in the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa in March 2017 CREDIT: ANSA

- [Nick Squires](#), ROME

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Adazzling collection of Modigliani paintings that went on display in Italy, believed to be worth tens of millions of pounds, has been declared fake.

The works, which include reclining nudes in the Italian artist's inimitable style, may now be destroyed.

Experts have warned that the collection is just “the tip of the iceberg” and that Modigliani, whose paintings fetch huge sums, is one of the most copied artists in the world.

The 21 paintings went on display last spring in Genoa's Palazzo Ducale amid great fanfare and were seen by tens of thousands of visitors.

But Carlo Pepi, an art expert from Tuscany, soon raised doubts about their authenticity and the exhibition was eventually closed in July, with the paintings handed over to investigators.

After months of study, art historians have now declared all the paintings to be clever reproductions apart from one, which has a certificate of authenticity from the Italian government and appears to be genuine.

The alleged fakes included a portrait of the artist and writer Jean Cocteau, a seated nude, a reclining nude and a seated woman.



A painting, attributed to Modigliani, on display in Genoa. The exhibition ran from March to July 2017 CREDIT: ANSA

“Finally it's come out into the open,” said Mr Pepi, who believes most of the fakes were painted in the 1980s.

“I've been fighting against fake Modiglianis for years. The situation is grotesque - it sometimes seems that he painted more when he was dead than when he was alive. This is just the tip of the iceberg.”

Isabella Quattrocchi, a consultant who was brought in by prosecutors to study the paintings, said they were “blatantly fake”.

The frames around the paintings were from Eastern Europe and the United States and “have nothing to do, either in context or historical period, with Modigliani,” she said.

Marc Restellini, a French expert on Modigliani, said: “It is indisputable that the works are fakes and I have presented the proof. I’ve given all the information in my possession to the Carabinieri in order to explain how this counterfeiting system works.”

Mr Restellini, who has organized Modigliani exhibitions around the world, has said he believes that there are “at least 1,000 Modigliani fakes in the world.”

Fake Modiglianis were being produced as early as the 1920s, shortly after the artist’s death, and scientific testing of works now attributed to him has only begun in earnest recently.

Three people are now under investigation for the alleged fakes, including Rudy Chiappini, the curator of the art exhibition, and Joseph Guttman, a Hungarian art dealer who owns 11 of the works.

The paintings are being held by a specialist art fraud unit of the Carabinieri paramilitary police, who are trying to establish who may have created the paintings.



The exhibition was held in the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa last year CREDIT: ANSA

A collection of Modigliani paintings is currently being held at the Tate Modern in London; there is no suggestion from Italian experts that any of those works are fake.

“This project developed independently of any other Modigliani exhibition and we have no concerns about the works that it features,” a Tate Modern spokeswoman said.

The Tate had carried out routine checks of the Modigliani works, “as we often do for other artists’ works, especially when an upcoming exhibition is being prepared. Other recent examples include Rothko, Picabia, Hockney and Picasso,” she said.

The exact number of works produced by Modigliani is hard to know, because he often gave away sketches, sometimes in exchange for meals or drinks in Paris restaurants.

It is estimated that at last 350 painting are in existence today.

Now acknowledged as one of the most original artists of the 20th century, during his life Amedeo Modigliani suffered from ill health and drug and alcohol abuse, and struggled to sell his paintings.

Born in Livorno in Tuscany in 1884, he studied in Venice and then moved to Paris, where he knew Picasso and lived the life of a bohemian.

His only solo exhibition, held in Paris in 1917, was raided by the police on the grounds of indecency.

He became known for his distinctive style of painting, his portraits characterized by elongated necks, almond eyes and oval faces. He died of tubercular meningitis in 1920, aged 35.

In 2015 a Chinese art collector paid \$170 million at an auction in New York for a Modigliani painting, *Nu couché* (Reclining Nude)

